

Parent first, friend later!

"I haven't lost my temper or yelled at my kid yet today. But in a few minutes, I'm going to get out of bed, and from then on I'm probably going to need a lot more help!"

No doubt many parents feel like this at one time or another. Today's children are growing up surrounded by bigger and more dangerous challenges than in years' past. Now more than ever, children need firm, sometimes tough, direction from the adults who care about them. Children do not need parents to be their friends, allowing them to do whatever they want with no consequences. Most of us know parents who want to be their children's best friends. What follows are three cautionary tales.

Recently a 5th grade teacher in a small rural community shared a conversation she had with the mother of an 11-year-old student.

Mother: How can I get my daughter to stop calling boys and talking dirty to them on the telephone?

Teacher (surprised): Don't let her use the phone!

Mother: That won't work.

Teacher: Why not?

Mother: Because she will just use the phone in her room.

Teacher: Take away that phone.

Mother: I can't.

Teacher: Why not!

Mother: Because, it's her phone.

This case indicates that the parent is permissive, which will pose problems in the future as the daughter enters her teens and the stakes are much higher.

One evening, after a parent night at school, I talked with the school counselor about current issues that teens deal with. A parent joined the discussion, explaining that she was struggling with the decision of whether or not to let her 9th grade daughter go to Mexico on Spring Break because, all her friends get to go. When we asked this parent if she had talked to the parents of any of her daughter's friends that were (supposedly) getting to go, she said, "No, I don't want my daughter to think that I don't trust her." The counselor and I quickly assured this mother that safety, not trust was the issue here. The daughter might be angry, but the mother, as the responsible adult, needed to set some limits. At the very least she needed to talk with the other parents and find out more details.

A mother recently called my office and said that her daughter came home smelling like marijuana. When confronted, the daughter said that she had been smoking herbal cigarettes. After researching this, we learned that herbal (sometimes called clove) cigarettes are indeed available locally. The price is nearly \$5.00 per pack. Although they do not contain marijuana, they do smell like marijuana when burned, contain unknown ingredients and might serve as a seemingly plausible cover story for kids who do smoke marijuana. When questioned about the pungent smell on their clothes or hair, they might tell their parents that they are smoking herbal cigarettes and assume that this response makes everything okay. It's not! Herbal cigarettes are unregulated and contain substances that could cause health problems or allergic reactions.

The bottom line is, parents today need information about the drugs and situations their children encounter. Parents need to set limits, and they need support for doing so. It is not easy to enforce limits with your child or teen. So, if you are hearing "You're so unfair!" "Everyone else's mom said it's okay!" or "I can't believe you're doing this to me" check out the SAMHSA family website at <http://www.family.samhsa.gov/> for suggestions on talking with your child, setting rules, being a role model, teaching kids to choose friends wisely, or monitoring your child's activities (be sure to scroll to the right side of the screen). Most communities also offer parenting classes through schools, recreation or community centers, houses of worship, etc. Such classes offer suggestions on how to talk with your children about drugs and alcohol use.

Every state also has a Regional Alcohol and Drug Awareness Resource (RADAR) Network Center. For a state directory of these centers visit: <http://ncadi.samhsa.gov/radar/>. Call your center to ask what resources are available to you.

A resource for talking with loved ones about their behaviors of concern is the *See it, Say it* video series, www.miph.org/hpr, available through Health Promotion Resources (HPR), a division of the Minnesota Institute of Public Health. Contact Katie Zientara at 1-800-782-1878, ext. 129 or kzientara@miph.org.

You can be knowledgeable and loving while also being tough. Some day your kids may thank you for it!

